

# **IQBAL'S CONCEPT OF METHODOLOGY OF RESEARCH**

**By**

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The genius of Allama Muhammad Iqbal (1877-1938) has been recognized widely<sup>1</sup>. His works, speeches and statements testify that he attached marked importance to the concept of research. In the preface to his "The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam", he wrote: "As knowledge advances and fresh avenues of thought are opened, other views, and probably sounder views than those set forth in these lectures, are possible. Our duty is carefully to watch the progress of human thought and to maintain an independent critical attitude towards it".<sup>2</sup> The remarks show the vision and modesty of that great thinker, and state the need to note the progress of human thought through critical research.

Some scholars<sup>3</sup> have written on Iqbal's methodology of research. There is an urgent need to conduct a detailed study

on this theme, and gauge how Iqbal's concept meets the demands of post-modern thought. This essay aims to highlight: Iqbal's ideas on the significance of research; the bases of methodology of research; the framework of research; and the question of perennial relevance of Iqbal's methodology.

## **IQBAL'S IDEAS ON THE SIGNIFICANCE OF RESEARCH**

Iqbal possessed profound knowledge of Eastern and Western thought patterns. He analyzed the role of research and action in the rise and fall of nations, and considered research set-up to be essential for progress. In an "Iqbal Day" function in December 1937, just four months before Iqbal's death, the Chief Minister of Punjab province proposed that a sizeable amount of money be collected and presented to the Allama on that occasion. Those days Iqbal was very ill and reportedly in financial hardship. In reply to that proposal, the Allama stated that the needs of the society take precedence over the needs of an individual. The individual may be a source of inspiration for the society, but the needs of an individual are of a passing nature. The demands of the society, however, are more lasting. Iqbal pointed out that the local Islamia College was in dire need of an Islamic Research set-up. In Punjab, Islamic

history, Fiqh and religious studies had been ignored totally when compared to the rest of Indian regions. He hoped that the Chief Minister would agree to establish an Islamic Research Department in the college. The Allama donated a sum of rupees one hundred from his pocket, for that project <sup>4</sup>. This incident reveals that Iqbal held research work in very high esteem.

A glance at Iqbal's works suggests that his ideas developed gradually, and a harmony existed in his thought <sup>5</sup>. Dr. Javed Iqbal, a son of Allama, discusses the development of Iqbal's ideas under two periods - the "Period of Seeking" and the "Period of Discovery." The Period of Seeking extended roughly from 1895 to 1912. In this period he wrote on whatever moved him. The period terminated with the famous poem "Shikwa" and "Jawab-i-Shikwa" (The Complaint and the Answer). In the poem, the basic causes of rise and fall of nations were discussed in a moving way. The Period of Discovery extended from 1912-1938. In the writings of this period, the Allama displayed very high intellectual level. An appreciation of the ideas of this period requires comprehensive knowledge of modern philosophy in Europe besides understanding of the Islamic religio-cultural tradition <sup>6</sup>, and command of Arabic and Persian languages. His writings in Urdu language also bear the

imprint of Arabic and Persian.

Iqbal was clearly influenced by the conditions of Muslims, and specially at the end of World War I. With the defeat of Turkey, Iraq and Palestine went to the British. Syria was taken over by the French. Northern Iran went under Russian sway, and Southern Iran was under British grip. Western colonialists ruled almost all territories in Africa and Asia where Muslims were in majority<sup>7</sup>. Iqbal lamented the political decline of Muslims in "Khidr-i-Rah" saying<sup>8</sup>:

لے گئے تثلیث کے فرزند میراثِ خلیل      نشت بنیاد کلیسا بن گئی خاکِ حجاز  
حکمتِ مغرب سے ملت کی یہ کیفیت ہوئی۔      کلترے کلترے جس طرح سونے کو کر دیتا ہے گاڑ  
ہو گیا مانند آپ ارزاں مسلمان کالہوں۔      مضطرب ہے تو کہ تیرا دل نہیں دانائے راز

(The Trinitarians took away the heritage of Prophet Ibrahim, And the clay of Hijaz has served as foundation bricks of the Church....Western diplomacy has done to the Muslim Ummah. What gauze (wire) does to (a lump of) gold. It cuts gold into pieces.

Muslim blood has become cheap as water.

You are fretful over it because you do not know the secret.)

The laments of the Allama, however, did not carry the feelings of defeat and surrender. He analyzed the causes of Western power, and exhorted those under Western sway to observe critically and act wisely. This was possible only through

self-reliance and independent research. In "Javed Namah", Allama said 9:

قوت مغرب نہ از چنگ و رباب۔ نے ز رقص دختران بے حجاب  
نے ز بحر ساحران لالہ روست۔ نے ز عریاں ساق و نے از قطع مو  
تکلی اور انداز لا دینی است۔ نے فروغش از خط لاطینی است  
قوت افرنگ از علم و فن است۔ از ہمیں آتش چراغش روشن است

(West is powerful neither on account of its musical instruments nor musical concerts Nor because of the dances by immodest (naked) girls.

Its power depends neither on the magic of beauties with glowing faces Nor does it come from naked shins and cut-out tresses. Its might does not lie in secularism.

Its prosperity is not the outcome of Latin alphabet.

Strength of Europe rests on Sciences and Arts This is the fire that keeps its lamp burning)

## BASES OF METHODOLOGY OF RESEARCH

There is no widely acceptable definition of methodology. Dr. F.R. Faridi, however, notes"..... there is a consensus that methodology is the way to acquire knowledge: It is an approach to reality. It is the study of principles and guidelines that regulate the acquisition of knowledge and its growth in general, and ordered knowledge in particulars, that involves the acceptance or rejection of propositions as part of the body

of knowledge in a particular field."<sup>10</sup>. "The macro-paradigm of the researcher plays a dominant role in the application of a methodology also. Iqbal explicated various aspects of reality in "The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam". In his discussion, he remarked: "The one noteworthy feature of the Quran is the emphasis that it lays on this observable aspect of reality."<sup>11</sup> He then cited a few verses of the Quran to support his viewpoint. While explaining "The Revelations of Religious Experience", the Allama wrote: "Personally, I believe that the ultimate character of Reality is spiritual."<sup>12</sup> He concluded that lecture saying: "Thus the facts of experience justify the inference that the ultimate nature of Reality is spiritual and must be conceived as an ego."<sup>13</sup>

Iqbal's methodology aimed to acquire knowledge with a view to approach Reality, and also enable Muslims to reconstruct their social lives in the light of ultimate principles of Islam. Besides, he remained keenly interested in the search for a social order built on the broadest humanistic foundations - rejecting race, caste and colour which have always been dividing factors. In the New Year Day message issued by him through All India Radio on 1 January 1938, Iqbal said: "The modern age prides itself on its progress in knowledge and its matchless scientific developments. No doubt the pride is justified..... But in spite

of all those developments, tyranny of imperialism struts abroad.....After subjugating and establishing their dominion over weaker peoples, they have robbed them of their religious, their morals, of their cultural traditions and literatures... Remember, man can be maintained on this earth only by honouring mankind... Only one unity is dependable, and that unity is brotherhood of man, which is above race, nationality, colour or language."<sup>14</sup> With regard to the issues of racialism and nationalism, Iqbal believed that Islam was the best antidote to the evils of all 'isms'. Islam stood for a society based on the principles of equality, social justice and human brotherhood. Iqbal's methodology of research is based on three principles, which he considered essential for a just society. The methodology is shaped in an Islamic perspective. Iqbal's approach is anchored in Quran and Sunnah. In lecture entitled "Is Religion Possible?", he said: "Religion, which is essentially a mode of actual living, is the only serious way of handling Reality."<sup>15</sup> "Quran and Sunnah, being the sheet anchor of religion, were considered final while judging issues and their solution by the society. He termed faith to be important, and in "Rumuz-i-Bekhudī" wrote<sup>16</sup>:

بے ہنرداں نزو بے دیں ہم قلم ہم تیغ را۔ چوں نباشد دین نباشد ملک و آہن را شمن

(For the man without Faith,

The pen and the sword are alike worthless!

When there is no Faith.

Neither the pen nor the sword have any value!)

In "Asrar-i-Khudi", the Allama said<sup>17</sup> that a perfect individual identifies his will with the Divine Purpose:

تالبع حق دیدش نادیدش - خوردش نوشیدش خوابیدش

.(He subordinates everything to God:

His seeing and not seeing, his eating and drinking and sleeping!)

Again in "Rumuz-i-Bekhudi", he elucidated that "Tawhid seeks to provide unity to the divided world. The Prophethood in turn brings a message of peace for mankind.

لااله سربايد اسرار ما - رشته اش شیرازہ افکار ما

("There is no god but God" is the capital of our life <sup>18</sup>

Its bond weaves our scattered thoughts together!)

از رسالت در جہاں بگوین ما - از رسالت دین ما آئین ما

از رسالت صد ہزار ما یک است - جزو ما جزو ما لایفک است

ما ز حکم نسبت اور ملتیم - اہل علم را پیام ر ملتیم

(Prophethood is the basis of our organization <sup>19</sup>,

our religion and our law.

It creates unity in our diversity.

It makes us into a well-knit community,



It brings a message of peace for mankind!).

In the second principle of methodology, Iqbal stipulated that in research the glitter of Western advancement should not be taken at its face value. In "Bang-i-Dara", he wrote 20:

نظر کو خیرہ کرتی ہے چمک تہذیبِ حاضر کی۔ یہ صنّاعی مگر جوئے نگوں کی ریزہ کاری ہے

(The glamour of the contemporary civilization is dazzling to the eye, But all this show of art is the product of shoddy diamonds!) In "Darb-i-Kalim, he said 21:

فسادِ قلب و نظر ہے فرنگ کی تہذیب۔ کہ روح اس مدنیت کی رہ سکی نہ عقیف

(The Western culture depraves vision and soul,  
For the spirit of this culture has lost piety!)

Again in "Darb-i-Kalim, he wrote 22:

اہلِ نظر ہیں یورپ سے نومید۔ ان امتوں کے باطن نہیں پاک

(Those who have vision are despaired of the West,  
The very soul of those nations are corrupt!)

From the ideas of the Allama just reported, it transpires that he was appalled by the decline in Western culture and considered it baneful for mankind. The situation has aggravated during the last sixty years after Iqbal. Some Western scholars have already taken note of the grisly conditions in this regard 23.

Self-reliance remained a seminal principle in Iqbal's thought. It held a pivotal place in Allama's concept of ego. Self-reliance

has been discussed in almost all works of Iqbal. In "Payam-i-Mashriq", he said 24:

نکردم از کس در یوزہ چشم - جہاں را جز بستم خود ندیدم

(Never was I a mendicant for another's sight,  
Nor looked at the world but with my own eyes.)

In "Bal-i-Jibril", he wrote 25:

اٹھانہ شیشہ گران فرنگ کے احساں - سفال ہند سے مینا و جام پیدا کر

(Be not indebted to the glass makers of the West,  
Make thy flagon and cup with the clay of Ind!)

In "Ramuz-i-Bekhud", he recorded 26:

فرد فرد آمد کہ خوداروا شناخت - قوم قوم آمد کہ جز با خود ساخت

(An individual becomes unique through self-realization,  
A nation becomes truly itself when it is true to itself)

In "Javed Namah", Iqbal advised 27:

مرد حق برندہ چوں شمشیر باش - خود جہاں را تقدیر باش

(Man of truth! Be sharp and incisive like the sword,  
And forge the destiny of thy own world!)

In "Bal-i-Jibril", he mentioned an eternal law saying 28:

تقدیر کے قاضی کا یہ فتویٰ ہے ازل سے ہے جرم ضعیفی کی سزا مرگ و فاجات

(It is the eternal decree of the Judge sitting in judgment on destinies The punishment of the weak is but an unexpected death) Self-reliance in research work can hardly be ignored.

Iqbal carried a clear vision of framework of research and expressed it.

### **FRAMEWORK OF RESEARCH**

Iqbal remained devoted to search and inquiry with a view to find avenues to solve the problems of Muslims. His "Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam" epitomizes guidelines for research in social sciences. Professor Burhan Ahmad Faruqi diligently evaluated that work, and indicated ways to conduct research on the broad pattern of Iqbal <sup>29</sup>. Muhammad Ahmad Khan in his "Iqbal's Views on Islamic Research" rightly observes that Iqbal did not present any formal 'Framework of Research.'<sup>30</sup> Iqbal's detailed comments in the letter dated June 4, 1925, addressed to Vice-Chancellor of Muslim University at Aligarh, however, amply crystallize his views on the framework of research <sup>31</sup>. In this context, Iqbal's ideas on the need for a research institution, foci of research work, and training of researchers may be reported.

### **NEED FOR A RESEARCH INSTITUTION**

Writings on Iqbal <sup>32</sup> suggests he was convinced of the need to establish an institution devoted to conduct research on the

socio-cultural issues of Muslims. In a letter addressed to the Rector of al-Azhar in Cairo, Iqbal expressed his desire to establish an Islamic institution par excellence, in a village of Punjab. He desired that the institution shall have a hostel and a well equipped library, having both current and ancient works. Experts in modern and traditional sciences shall comprise the teaching staff. The staff shall be under the guidance of a highly qualified and learned scholar, having real acumen and dedication to promote the cause of Islamic thought. He should be instrumental in the reconstruction of economic, political, and intellectual thought through his knowledge and writings. This shall help to revive Islamic civilization <sup>33</sup>.

The letter mentioned above, affords a peep at Iqbal's ideas in this regard. To a researcher, Iqbal advised that he should go to Egypt to acquire mastery in Arabic knowledge, study religious and political history of Islam, carefully study Islamic mysticism, fiqh and exegesis of the Quran. Iqbal goaded on that researcher's ambition to try and reach the real spirit of the teachings of the Prophet (PBUH) <sup>34</sup>. And that was Iqbal's real aim to establish an institution for Islamic research.

## **FOCI OF RESEARCH WORK**

Iqbal aimed to focus on two aspects of research. These were, reconstruct Islamic thought in the light of current social sciences, and to explain social system of Islam in contemporary perspective. Iqbal hoped that his approach will help to highlight the dynamic nature of Islam and serve humanity at large. "The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam", is generally taken as a pioneer work of a high quality. In the first lecture on "Knowledge and Religious Experience", he argued that basic principles of current social sciences - observation of natural phenomena, inductive method of reasoning, and experimental system of research and discovery - owe their origin to Islamic teachings. The Islamic scholars have contributed to these principles in the glorious period of Islamic history. Iqbal hoped that scholars of his age could revive the tradition of Islamic scholarship. Some contemporary scholars have attempted to convey Iqbal's ideas expressed in his lectures.<sup>35</sup> Iqbal's lectures need careful study in order to comprehend the logic of his method of research, and grasp the essentials for reconstructing Islamic thought.

The second aspect of Iqbal's focus was to explain the

social system of Islam in contemporary perspective. His lecture, "The Muslim Community: A Sociological Study", delivered in December 1911 at Muslim University at Aligarh, shows his interest in social problems of the community. The record of his correspondence with various scholars indicates that he wished to conduct research on the social system of Islam to include social, economic, political and legal facets of Islamic teachings <sup>36</sup>. He had drawn an outline plan of his proposed work <sup>37</sup>, but could not complete his project during his lifetime. Siddiq Javed in his doctoral thesis entitled "Fikr-i-Iqbal ka Imrani Mutaliah" discussed three approaches to Iqbal's sociological thought - economic aspect, status of women in his social thought, and social import of Taqlid (Tradition) and Ijtihad. That researcher rightly concluded his study saying, "Iqbal's thought is essentially social."<sup>38</sup> In the post-modern condition, political economy has assumed great importance and a fresh look at Iqbal's social thought is urgently needed.

## TRAINING OF RESEARCHERS

Research is by no means a one-man affair. It requires a team

of experts. Iqbal aimed to train a dedicated team of young scholars who could spearhead the promotion of Islamic thought in the world, and boost the sagging morale of Muslim community. Some salient features of his scheme may be reported. (1) Iqbal proposed to impart further training to selected graduates from universities and madaris, before incorporating them in an Islamic university. Those from madaris should receive training in contemporary sciences like sociology, economics and politics. Later, they could specialize in a particular field of their choice. Those from the universities should be trained in Arabic language, imparted instruction in the Quran, the Hadith, fiqh and the exegesis of the Quran. (2) These researchers should acquire knowledge of a foreign language as well. (3) He also wished to train scholars with interest in physical sciences. He proposed that mathematics, science and philosophy be included in the training of graduates from the madaris. (4) Iqbal expressed preference for graduates from the madaris, because they possessed grounding in Islamic disciplines and better knowledge of Arabic language<sup>39</sup>.

#### **DOES IQBAL'S METHODOLOGY HAVE A PERENNIAL RELEVANCE?**

A glance at Iqbal's methodology of research may raise natural

a question. What is the relevance of his ideas in the post-modern context, specially when religion has been pushed to the backstage in the West? Religious resurgence <sup>40</sup> in the world testifies that religious values are already posing challenge to the demon unleashed by post-modernism. Some Western scholars are questioning the validity of post-modernism <sup>41</sup> already. In "Darb-i-Kalim", Iqbal wrote <sup>42</sup>:

زمانہ ایک حیات ایک کائنات بھی ایک دلیل کم نظری قصہ جدید و قدیم

(Time is one, life is one, the universe is one,

To talk of ancient and modern is but short-sightedness.)

The couplet highlights the view that genuine thoughts have a perennial wisdom and a lasting relevance. The current post-modern condition is no exception to it.

Mike Featherstone in his discussion of the term post-modernism notes, "In the literary, critical, and academic fields post-modernism implies an anti-foundational critique of all metanarratives, be it in science, religion, philosophy, humanism, Marxism, or other systematic body of knowledge."<sup>43</sup> Such a claim of post-modernism, as outlined by Featherstone, on the face of it leaves no leeway for the ideas of Iqbal. In practice, however, the situation is somewhat different <sup>44</sup>. Michael W. Apple in his "What Postmodernists Forget: Cultural Capital and Official Knowledge", presents a



totally altered version of post-modernism. Excerpts from Apple show that post-modernism promotes the 'metanarrative' of consumerism. "There is a new generation of 'cooperative relations' between education and industry now being built. Among the most 'interesting' is something many of you may not know much about. It is called Channel One. Channel One is a commercially produced television news program that is now broadcast to thousand of schools in the United States... What is important here, however, is that for between 35 per cent and 40 per cent of all middle and high school students in the nation, we have sold our children as a captive audience to advertisers.... I could say considerably more here, for I have only touched the surface of the emerging trends towards commodification and privatization that education is currently facing."<sup>45</sup> "From what Apple says, the peril to education in the third world needs no elaboration. Consumer culture has already made inroads into the developing countries. It may be reported that Iqbal had foreseen the coming of such a time when he said in "Bal-i-Jibril"<sup>46</sup>:

خبر ملی ہے خدایاں بحر و بر سے مجھے فرنگ رہگزر سیل بے پناہ میں بنے

(Lords of oceans and of earth have communicated to me the tidings that Europe is about to be swept away by an irresistible inundation!).

The building pattern of education aside, the existing post-modern family system having single-parent, surrogate-mother, lesbian families and other variants<sup>47</sup> is a part of the inundation predicated by Iqbal.

Iqbal's approach elucidated here, is based on the teachings of the Quran and the Sunnah. It covers all aspects of life, and has inbuilt flexibility to accommodate the needs of permanence and social change. His method is, therefore, perennial in its nature. It has relevance in post-modern situation as well.

In conclusion, it may be mentioned that Iqbal's concept of methodology of research is highly vigorous. It has a perennial nature, and can meet the challenges of post-modernism. There is a need to conduct further research on this theme, and prepare for future developments. Iqbal in "Darb-i-Kalim" reminds the reader that tide is likely to turn <sup>48</sup>:

اب تیرا دور بھی آنے کو ہے اے فقر غیور۔ کھا گئی روح فرنگی کو ہوائے زروسیم

(The self-respecting Faqr will soon have its day,

The greed for gold and silver has corrupted the soul of the West!)

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3. For example see: Muhammad Ahmad Khan. "Iqbal aur Maslah Talim" (Urdu). Lahore: Iqbal Academy, 1978. Chapters 8 and 9.
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8. Muhammad Iqbal. "Bang-i-Dara". Lahore: Sheikh Ghulam Ali and Sons, Nov 1986 (7<sup>th</sup> ed.) p. 264.
9. Muhammad Iqbal "Javed Namah". Lahore: Sheikh Ghulam Ali and Sons, 1992. p. 232.
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11. "The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam", op. cit. (S. No. 2). p. 13.
12. ibid. p. 38.

13. *ibid.* p. 61.
14. Quoted in Ltif Ahmed Sherwani (ed.). "Speeches, Writings and Statements of Iqbal". Lahore: Iqbal Academy, 1977. pp. 249-251.
15. *ibid.* p. 150.
16. *ibid.* p. 218.
17. *ibid.* p. 218.
18. *ibid.* p. 218.
19. *ibid.* p. 218.
20. "Bang-i-Dara". *op. cit.* (S. No. 8) p. 274.
21. "Darb-i-Kalim. Lahore: Sheikh Ghulam Ali and Sons, 1986. p. 71.
22. *ibid.* p. 114.
23. For example see: Francis Fukuyama. "The Great Disruption". New York: The Free Press, 1999. That author has described social chaos in all developed countries in his work.
24. "Payam-i-Mashraq". Lahore: Sheikh Ghulam Ali and Sons, 1991. p. 102.
25. "Bal-i-Jibril". Lahore: Sheikh Ghulam Ali and Sons, 1986. p. 147.
26. "Asrar-o-Rumuz". *op. cit.* (S. No. 16). p. 350.
27. "Javed Namah". *op. cit.* (S. No. 9). p. 358.
28. "Bal-i-Jibril". *op. cit.* (S. No. 25). p. 157.
29. Burhan Ahmad Faruqui. "Quran aur Musalamnun ke Zinda Masail" (Urdu). Rawalpindi: Services Book Club, 1996. pp. 213-292.
30. Muhammad Ahmad Khan. *op. cit.* (S. No. 3). p. 405. This section is based on the research of that author generally.

31. For the letter, see "Iqbal Review", (Iqbal Academy, Karachi), Oct. 1962. Also see, Sheikh Atta Allah. "Iqbal Namah", vol. 2, Lahore: Sheikh Muhammad Ashraf, 1951. pp. 213-215.
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34. ibid. p. 399.
35. For example see: Mohammed Maruf. "Iqbal's Philosophy of Religion" Lahore: Islamic Book Services; 1977; Muhammad Khalid Mas'ud, "Iqbal's Reconstruction of Ijtihad". Lahore: Iqbal Academy, 1995.
36. For details see: "Iqbal Namah", op. cit. vol. I and II (S. No. 31 and 33); Syed Abdul Wahid Moini (ed.). "Maqalat-i-Iqbal". Sheikh Muhammad Ashraf Publisher, Lahore, 1963.
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43. Mike Featherstone "Consumer Culture, Post-modernism, and Global Disorder" in R. Robertson and W.R. Garrett (eds.) Religion and Global Order. New York: Paragon House, 1991 p. 150.
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46. "Bal-i-ibril". op. cit. (S. No. 25) p. 69.
47. For details see: John. J. Macionis. "Society", 4<sup>th</sup> ed. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1998. pp. 299-331.
48. "Darb-i-Kalim". op. cit. (S. No. 21). p. 30.